

**1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, and how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.**

The Peer Mediation Program "Keep The Peace" was established six years ago to provide students who have been identified as having special needs, with a format and alternative for dealing with and resolving conflicts within the school. This program augments vocational instruction at a shared-time special needs vocational school. Students involved in this peace initiative are in academic programs at their home school half of the day. During the remaining half of the day students attend a vocational program where they are given an opportunity to participate in a social skill group which allows them to be recognized as peace makers, and thereby receive positive feedback.

As a result of the peace keeping efforts of the peer mediators, students learn to deal with conflict and avoid negative disciplinary action. These same skills are taken from school to career.

The objectives of the program are:

1. To train at least two special needs students in each shop area in the process of resolving conflicts through the use of peer mediation. These students will be able to resolve 90% of the conflicts referred to them during the school year.
2. To collaborate with the local community college, parents, teachers and community leaders on the mediation process as it relates to real life issues. To establish open and clear communication with community leaders who will support this initiative.
3. To assist students in learning life long skills of peaceful coexistence.
4. To increase students self awareness and self mastery, while empowering students to control violence within their realm of life.

This peer mediation program follows a training manual which was designed by the students, teachers and social worker, borrowing from many sources. For this reason the program can be replicated in any special needs program. It is unique in that the information has been adapted to meet the needs of a challenged student population.

**2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the Core Curriculum Content and/or Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards that the practice addresses.**

The students have a wide variety of educational and emotional needs, having been classified by resident district schools. The students have been diagnosed as having perceptual, neurological, hearing, or communication impairments as well as emotional challenges, as per New Jersey Special Education Guidelines. Developing positive self esteem is an identified area of need. Social skills required for appropriate interaction at school and in the community become the cornerstone of the program.

The Peer Mediation Program meets the needs of students while targeting the skills mentioned above. Through the use of supportive small peer groups, guided by a clinical social worker, the students begin to come to terms with gaining more control and mastery over their lives. The use of many "hands on" initiatives are utilized in order to maximize problem solving skills and team effort.

The end result of these small, social skill group training sessions is a student feeling positive and in control. The positive effects are actualized in a noticeable reduction in fights and a peaceful environment.

The Core Curriculum Content Standards the Peer Mediation Program addresses are as follows:

Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards - All students will be able to:

- (1) develop career planning and workplace readiness skills;
- (2) use critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving skills;
- (3) demonstrate self management skills; and
- (4) apply safety principles.

### **3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.**

Evaluation of the Peer Mediation Program, "Keep the Peace" occurs quarterly during the school year. Careful statistics on violence-related suspensions, as well as the percentages of conflicts resolved, are gathered and studied. Comparisons from school year to school year are made in an effort to keep the training relevant to the needs of the students. Each year improvement has been noted. Suspensions related to violence have been reduced by 80% compared to the year before this program was implemented. Students have been able to successfully resolve 95% of all the conflicts referred to them each and every school year since the program's inception.

A school based planning team meeting is held semi-annually to review the program's progress as well as to "brainstorm" new ideas. This advisory committee includes parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community representatives.

Communication with the peer mediators, support staff and administration is a daily occurrence. The Peer Mediation Program "Keep the Peace" is effective because students are feeling good about what they are doing. Students are demonstrating skills which are contributing to the safe environment of the school. There are fewer violence-related suspensions. Most importantly, students say they are feeling productive, happy, and useful. It is the program's intent to cultivate citizens who will enter the work force better prepared to meet the challenges of daily life.